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ABSTRACT

This digest highlights ways in which new and seasoned teachers are developing a repertoire of skills and knowledge that complement education reform efforts. For example, rather than seeing each stage of a teacher's professional life as distinct and separate, a more holistic view of the development of teacher from novice to advanced practitioner is recommended. Inservice programs must be recast to reflect the following paradigm shifts: (1) from deficit-based to competency-based approaches; (2) from replication to reflection; (3) from learning separately to learning together; and (4) from centralization to decentralization or site-based management. New concepts that have emerged in the past decade include professional development, partner, or clinical schools; educational partnerships; and mentoring programs. Societal issues such as crime, drug and alcohol abuse, poverty, homelessness, and child abuse have also influenced how teachers practice and are trained. To meet these challenges greater collaboration between social service providers and educators has become necessary. Results of this collaboration are evident in comprehensive service programs involving schools of education, medicine, nursing, criminal justice, and social work. (Contains eight references.) (LL)

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Reconceptualizing Professional Teacher Development

Introduction

The challenges and rewards of the teaching profession have never been greater. The range and type of information that students need to know far exceeds that of previous decades, and the academic expectations for all students are increasing in virtually every state and community. The nation's schools are more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse than at any other point in history, and there is much discussion about how all students will meet the emerging subject-matter standards. Most school systems seek to transform their schools to respond to a host of issues, ranging from these increased student expectations to the conditions that students must confront in their communities. It is clear that caring and competent teachers are vital to the success of each of these initiatives and equally clear that preservice and inservice teacher professional development must change to equip teachers to meet these challenges.

This Digest highlights ways in which new and seasoned teachers are developing a repertoire of skills and knowledge that complement education reform efforts.

New Conceptions for Teacher Development

In order to be of greater value to teachers and students, preservice and inservice professional development must be reconceptualized. Rather than seeing each stage of a teacher's professional life as distinct and separate, a more holistic view of the development of a teacher from novice to advanced practitioner is needed. In order to establish a rich learning environment for teachers throughout their careers, a number of prevailing concepts must be abandoned. Smylie and Conyers (1991) suggest that we must recast inservice programs to reflect the following paradigm shifts:

From deficit-based to competency-based approaches in which teachers' knowledge, skills, and experiences are considered assets. Professional development organized according to this approach will, in Smylie and Conyers' view, shift teachers away from dependency on external sources for the solution to their problems and toward professional growth and self-reliance in instructional decision making. This concept has emerged as crucial in initial teacher education as prospective teachers become increasingly diverse in background, age, and experience. Such a model also helps teachers understand the diverse K–12 student population (Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992; Delpit, 1988). Well-designed **case studies**, which allow practicing teachers to learn from and value the experiences of others, are becoming more common as training instruments.

From replication to reflection, in which practicing teachers focus less on the transfer of knowledge and strategy and more on analytical and reflective learning. Smylie and Conyers suggest that this reflective approach will sharpen teachers' skills in problem solving, determining students' needs, and conducting **action research** that is designed to develop new knowledge and skills related specifically to their schools and classrooms. Providers of inservice programs need to consider, however, that teachers have little time during the school day to pause, reflect on practice, or conduct research. Ways need to be found to provide practicing teachers with such time.

Reflection has proven useful in the preparation of prospective teachers who are asked to maintain **student journals** and **portfolios**. Guided by seasoned professionals, beginning teachers use these tools to understand their own teaching strengths and weaknesses. Journals and portfolios also show promise for experienced classroom teachers and for college faculty to examine their beliefs, knowledge, and experiences over time.

From learning separately to learning together, in which practicing teachers are jointly responsible for their work in classrooms, and their wisdom and experiences are perceived as professional resources. Smylie and Conyers (1991) note that this conception has important implications for how schools are organized, in other words, as places for teachers to learn as well as to teach. This paradigm shift addresses one of the most pervasive conditions of classroom teachers—isolation, or the inability to learn and to communicate with colleagues in the place where it counts most—the school. Perhaps one of the most popular mechanisms for "learning together" is the **professional development** or **clinical school**. These professional development sites offer practicing teachers, prospective teachers, and college faculty the opportunity to exchange pedagogical knowledge and ideas at school.

From centralization to decentralization, in which the role of a school system's central administration shifts from identifying and organizing staff development activities to supporting and facilitating those that school-based staff have determined are important and necessary. Decentralization allows for more tailored professional development activities and has implications beyond the topic and content of the activity. One characteristic of this approach is that professional development, inservice in particular, increasingly is being conducted in and by school systems rather than in colleges and universities.

As Little (1993) notes, restructuring professional development around such concepts is easier said than done because the current system often contradicts or fails to accommodate new requirements and initiatives. Newly informed professional development calls not only for training, but also for the adequate opportunity to learn within a teacher's day-to-day work. On the other hand, in the absence of a good fit between the

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nature of a reform and the nature of professional development, schools and school systems are inclined to do something, and that something is likely to look like the existing menu of training options.

New Models for Preparation, Induction, and Development

In the past decade, scholars, prompted by education policymakers, focused much attention on reconceptualizing the manner in which we teach prospective teachers and ensure the continuing learning of practicing teachers. Genuinely new concepts have emerged from these deliberations so that today teacher education is talked of as a lifelong experience that extends from program admission to retirement. A number of new formats for such development have also emerged, not the least of which are professional development, partner, or clinical schools that are designed to train prospective, nurture novice, and refresh seasoned teachers on the school site (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Mentoring programs pair novice teachers with outstanding experienced teachers who can explain school policies and practices, share methods and materials, and help solve problems. Mentors may also guide the professional growth of new teachers by promoting reflection and fostering the norms of collaboration and shared inquiry (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992).

Societal issues such as crime, drug and alcohol abuse, poverty, homelessness, and childabuse have also influenced how teachers practice and the nature of their training. It is becoming increasingly evident to many educators that greater collaboration among social service providers is necessary in order to meet the first National Education Goal—that all children in America will start school ready to learn—and to ensure effective academic careers for all students. Consequently, there are a number of comprehensive service or cross-professional training programs under development involving schools of education, medicine, law, nursing, criminal justice, and social work.

Conclusion

Asayesh (1994) states, "Over the past 5 to 10 years, more and more school districts have reorganized to give power to those most responsible for educating children" (p.2). Despite budget cuts, educators perceive that this decentralization, or site-based management, has created new opportunities for growth, particularly among school staff. According to Miller, Lord, and Dorney (1994), most school systems presume that an investment in professional development will pay off in teachers' implementation of innovations or in prescribed changes in their classroom practice. This view, while seemingly fair, is also limiting; it calls for results more definitive or immediate than can sometimes be expected.

Professional development is an aspect of school reform that is receiving enormous attention. It is also an area about which surprisingly little is known, with only a handful of studies that document its provision, costs, and effect.

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References identified with an EJ or ED number have been abstracted and are in the ERIC database. Journal articles (EJ) should be available at most research libraries; most documents (ED) are available in microfiche collections at more than 700 locations. Documents can also be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service: (800) 443-ERIC.

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